

**West Mojave Plan  
Task Group 2  
Green Tree Inn, Victorville  
January 15, 2002**

**Attendees**

**Task Group:** Jim Arbogast, Jim Atkins, Pam Barber, Marie Brashear, C.A. Burge, Eunice Burge, Tom Dodson, Jeri Ferguson, Dick Forsythe, Jennifer Foster, Ken Foster, Joe Gautsch, Martin Gill, Mary Grimsley, Harold Johnson, Ted Kalil, Peter Kirakos, Paul Kober, Robert Koch, Carol Landry, David Matthews, Will Moring, Doug Parham, Ron Schiller, Ray Sims, Steve Smith, Debbie Stevens, Barbara Veale, John Vogel, Jim Wilson.

**West Mojave Team:** Bill Haigh, Larry LaPre, Ed LaRue, Valery Pilmer, Les Weeks.

**Introduction**

Bill Haigh opened the meeting at 6:10 P.M. and introductions were made. Haigh indicated that if anyone has any corrections to the meeting notes from the December 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting, to please call, e-mail or FAX him the correction.

Haigh informed the group that until further notice, the West Mojave Team will be unable to send out information and documents using e-mail. This is due to a court order, related to a case involving Indian Trust accounts, which prohibits Department of Interior employees from using the internet to conduct agency business. Haigh indicated he would be sending information to them through the regular mail for the time being. Haigh also noted that the West Mojave website will not be accessible until this issue is resolved through the courts.

Marie Brashear indicated that she had provided BLM with a set of USGS maps with mineralization data. She asked where and when this data will be folded into the route designation process. Brashear also noted that the State has maps that identify Mineral Resource Zones that should be considered. Haigh responded that this type of information needs to be folded in sooner rather than later and indicated that bringing together this type of data should occur within the next few weeks.

**Field Survey: Progress to date including maps**

Les Weeks, subconsultant with CH2M Hill, reviewed the status of the route survey. Weeks indicated that the group just completed the eighth survey weekend. Survey work has been done in the Ridgecrest, El Paso, Middle Knob, Red Mountain, Fremont, Kramer, Superior, Newberry Rodman and Coyote subregions. Of these, Ridgecrest is complete while additional 4-wheel drive and/or motorcycle survey work needs to be completed for the remainder. Weeks noted that before moving on to additional subregions, the 4-wheel drive teams will work on cleaning up the

ones already started, while the motorcycle teams catch up. Weeks invited anyone interested in observing the survey work to call him at (530) 676-1095.

The following questions and issues were raised:

- **What areas will be covered during the next survey weekend?**  
Les Weeks responded that the 4-wheel drive teams will complete Coyote, Superior and Newberry-Rodman subregions, and will return to the subregions already done to fill in data gaps.
- **When will the El Mirage subregion be surveyed?**  
Les Weeks responded perhaps late March. Bill Haigh added that it depends on funding, and how long it takes to complete the other subregions.
- **Why is the Red Mountain subregion considered sensitive?**  
Steve Smith indicated that the area is designated as critical habitat for the desert tortoise.
- **What is the funding situation for the route surveys?**  
Bill Haigh responded that at the moment it would take more money than is currently available to complete the survey for all 21 subregions. Haigh noted, however, that he is trying to get additional funding to complete the project.
- **Why is the route survey effort necessary?**  
Several speakers responded that the Denver aerial inventory had many inaccuracies. It was also noted that the newer USGS maps do not show all routes. Several individuals indicated that the on the ground survey method was the best means of capturing accurate data regarding the location and types of routes. Martin Gill noted that Riverside County attempted to use aerial photography to create mapping for emergency vehicle use, but the effort did not work as linear features other than roads were interpreted as being roads. Marie Brashear noted that ground truthing was done for the entire desert for the California Desert Plan by AMA, Cal 4-Wheel Drive and others. Brashear indicated that the information collected should be available somewhere in the BLM offices, and also noted that the satellite imagery does not show all routes. Harold Johnson noted that the inventory Brashear referred to was not a 100% inventory and has not been digitized for use in a GIS system. Johnson noted that the current ground survey will be a 100% inventory, with GPS locations for all routes.
- **At what point will the county road system be considered?**  
Bill Haigh noted that we have the county road information available for San Bernardino County.
- **Are all trails being surveyed, or only routes and trails used by motorized vehicles?**

Les Weeks noted that the survey is focused on routes used by motorized vehicles, however, it is often difficult to distinguish between hiking, equestrian and motorcycle trails. Weeks stated that if a route can be traveled by a motorcycle, it is being surveyed. Route designation, however, will affect the use of a route by motorized vehicles only. It will not affect continued use of a trail by hikers or equestrians. Robert Koch added that there are routes on the Denver inventory that can no longer be traveled. If the route cannot be traveled, it is not being surveyed.

- **Are routes that have been mulched and closed being inventoried?**

Jeri Ferguson stated that if a route has been signed as closed and restored, it is not being inventoried. Ferguson also noted that if a route is overgrown, but not marked as closed, it is being surveyed by the motorcycle survey teams. Some concern was expressed that if closed routes are not inventoried, it will be difficult to tell how many routes have already been lost to closures. It was noted that route closure and restoration has occurred primarily in the Ridgecrest area. Les Weeks noted that the route inventory is one source of information, but not the only one.

- **Can the final inventory and data layers used to make route designation decisions be provided to interested parties?**

Marie Brashear asked that this information be made available on CDs.

- **Concern was expressed that the project could be jeopardized if the remaining subregions are not surveyed in the same manner as the first nine.**

- **Hot spot areas were identified.**

Jim Wilson, motorcycle survey team member, identified areas that seem to be more heavily used than others. Wilson noted that the northern part of the Fremont subregion is heavily used, while the Kramer subregion, which is relatively flat, showed much less sign of use. Wilson also noted heavy motorcycle use in the Ridgecrest and Red Mountain area. Wilson indicated he felt the El Mirage subregion was “thrashed” due to very heavy OHV use in that subregion.

**Break 7:10 to 7:30 PM**

**Identification of Sensitive Biological Areas: Proposed Methodology**

Bill Haigh introduced Ed LaRue, Wildlife Biologist, to the group and indicated that he had asked LaRue to develop an approach to route designation which takes biological resources into consideration. The first cut at this approach includes consideration of tortoise habitat. Haigh indicated that if the approach seems worthwhile, it can be broadened to include other species as well.

Ed LaRue noted that the approach he is suggesting would make use of existing data, and stated

that based on tortoise surveys done since 1998 over approximately 3000 square miles, we have a pretty good picture of where tortoises do and do not occur. LaRue noted that as the biologists surveyed for tortoise sign, they also collected data regarding levels of human disturbance. LaRue stated that by looking at where tortoises occur, as well as where heavy levels of human disturbance exist, you can focus on where the best places are to reduce routes. LaRue asked whether the BLM should use this data in the model for route designation.

The following questions and comments were considered:

- **Were the open areas also surveyed?**  
LaRue confirmed that open areas were surveyed. Jeri Ferguson noted that she would like a copy of the Total Corrected Tortoise Sign map.
- **Does the information from the surveys show that the tortoise is recovering or declining in numbers?**  
LaRue noted that the surveys show the number of tortoises is declining. Considerable discussion occurred regarding the cause of the decline in tortoise numbers. It was noted that while the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) has had no mining or OHV use for 30 years, the area has experienced a 95% decline while tortoise numbers in a part of the Johnson Valley open area remain relatively high. LaRue noted that there are many causes for tortoise decline, including drought, disease, raven predation, etc., and biologists really don't know for certain why die offs have occurred in some areas and not others. LaRue stated that no tortoises have been found in the Lancaster area for ten years.
- **Consider frequency of use of a route as well as the season of use.**  
Ron Schiller asked that in considering whether to close a route or not, that staff take into account the use the route supports, as well as the frequency and season of use. Schiller noted that some routes may be used in a manner that does not impact species.
- **Assign highest value in the model to the least impacted habitat.**  
Martin Gill expressed concern with the proposed approach which would assign a high value to land that is good tortoise habitat, but impacted by human use. He felt this approach was backwards, and that the model should place a higher value on land that is good tortoise habitat, but relatively pristine. LaRue responded that the approach was intended to identify areas that need to be fixed. Bill Haigh noted that the variables can be reversed to test the methodology.

Bill Haigh asked Ed LaRue to review the criteria with the group. La Rue noted that the focus would be on the DWMA areas since these are the most important areas for the tortoise. LaRue is suggesting that tortoise sign, desert tortoise emphasis zone (DTEZ), percent slope, elevation, and cumulative disturbances be considered in the model. LaRue also noted that the tortoise is being used to test the model which would be expanded later to include other species. The following comments were made:

- **Use of cumulative disturbances in the model.**  
Jeri Ferguson noted that the use of cumulative disturbances in the model would be a hard sell since the DTNA has experienced a significant tortoise decline with minimal disturbance.
- **Tortoise decline and the degree of impact that motorized vehicles have had on that decline.**  
Considerable discussion occurred regarding tortoise decline and the degree of impact that motorized vehicles have had on that decline. Haigh noted that the model is an experiment at this point to identify areas that are hot spots and in need of protection as well as those areas that are not.
- **Will the attributes being collected during the route survey be considered?**  
Bill Haigh noted that as a part of route designation, all issues will be considered including collected attribute data. He noted that Ed LaRue's approach will help to identify the key biological areas in need of protection.
- **Private property and wilderness areas need to be shown on the route designation maps.**
- **Consider adding water sources as one of the criteria.**  
Ed LaRue noted that this initial exercise is focused on tortoises which are not dependent on specific water sources. He recognized that water sources will be more of a factor for other species, and that washes are important to tortoises.
- **How is a section of land defined?**  
Ed LaRue responded that a section of land is equal to one square mile (640 acres). LaRue noted that under the proposed model, every section of land that has been surveyed for tortoise would be given a numerical value ranging from 1 to 24.
- **What is DTEZ?**  
Ed LaRue responded that DTEZ stands for Desert Tortoise Emphasis Zone. LaRue noted that an analysis was done in 1997 for the West Mojave that designated areas, based on specified criteria, as high, medium, low or non DTEZ. A high DTEZ would meet criteria as the most favorable tortoise habitat.
- **How much consideration needs to be given to the remaining species?**  
Larry LaPre indicated that not all of the remaining species are road sensitive, however, about six to ten species are and will need to be considered. LaPre noted Lane Mountain milk vetch and Barstow woolly sunflower are two species that will need consideration. He indicated that the others will be less difficult to model.
- **Is the information currently available for all twelve criteria?**

Bill Haigh responded yes. Jeri Ferguson indicated she would like to see a hard copy or CD made available of the data used for the model.

- **Concentrate on serving the majority of interests rather than special interests.**
- **Is it possible to have a guarantee that the current open areas will remain?**  
Jim Atkins expressed concern that OHV interests may have to fight to keep the current open areas at some time in the future.

**Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting was set for Tuesday, February 19, 2002 from 6:00 to 9:00 PM.